

Art agencies to be celebrated in Northport

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

NORTHPORT — When American folklorist Bill Ivey took over as chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1998, the federal agency was under siege. The furor over grants made to controversial artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe meant the very idea of funding arts was hotly debated by politicians and cultural critics alike, and the future of the

NEA at times seemed to be uncertain. But Ivey, who will deliver the keynote address Thursday evening for the Maine Arts Commission's 50th anniversary event at Point Lookout in Northport, had a different vision for the agency. To make it happen, he spoke with hundreds of elected leaders to let them know about the good work the organization was doing to help the arts all around the country. "One of the things we learned

is that the arts can be taken into a political conversation and used for political advantage," the former chairman said Wednesday morning in a telephone interview. "Frankly, there haven't been any real problems for the agency since 2000 or 2001. What that means to me is that government support for cultural vitality has been taken off the table as a cultural issue. I think it's going to stay there." The gala celebration in Northport, which also includes a con-

cert with Grammy Award-winning pianist Paul Sullivan, is marking the 50th anniversary of the National Endowment for the Arts as well as that of the Maine Arts Commission. Ivey said he is looking forward to coming to Maine to learn about what is happening with the arts up here, as well as sharing stories from his tenure as the head of the national agency. He also is planning to discuss what is next for arts agencies in Maine and the country.

"To me, the biggest challenge is to move the arts out of what I call the 'amenity box' — that they're something nice to support when times are good and you have a little extra money," he said. "To me, as a core element of our democracy, the arts are every bit as important as the economy." According to the new cultural plan that will be unveiled by the Maine Arts Commission on Thursday evening, the two are
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KATHLEEN PIERCE | BDN
Adhem Ibrahim, a Maine College of Art student born in Baghdad, shows off his drawing of a giant chick, a symbol of life and death, on Monday in Portland. The 26-year-old nurtured baby chickens as a boy while growing up in a tumultuous war zone.

Finding hope

Born in a war zone, Maine art student took comfort in unlikely source

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

At the tender years when most children are delighting in the wonder of life, Adhem Ibrahim was dealing with death every day. Born in Baghdad under Saddam Hussein's rule, he lived in a state of constant fear. "Anyone could be wiped out at any time," he said. At age 7, he thought military tanks in the streets and dead bodies on the corner was the norm. "I had seen so much death, I didn't get

it until I was 8," said Ibrahim, a soft-spoken senior at Maine College of Art, who lives in Portland's East End. A soft, fuzzy creature showed him the way. While fleeing his native land for Syria, his father, a journalist, was killed for writing about Hussein. Then, Ibrahim took comfort in an unlikely source: fluffy, yellow, baby chickens. The animals sold on pushcarts on the street became his security blanket — and a good deal more. "I was raised by chicks. They taught me so much growing up about being gentle. They are a big part of the reason I am an artist,"

said the 26-year-old, who sought asylum with his family in the states, living for a time in Maine and then Virginia. "That softness I was given in the middle of the chaos. I was their mother, and they were mine." Now they are his muse. His artistic emblem. His talisman. Erin Hutton, director of exhibitions at MECA, invited Ibrahim to participate in a popup show in the school's Institute of Contemporary Art gallery last month. He had four days to create what he wanted. A series of pastel chicks on paper and poetry emerged.
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MSG ENTERTAINMENT
Unity native Sarah Lin Johnson is a Rockette with New York City's "Radio City Christmas Spectacular."

From Unity to the NYC Rockettes

Maine native sees 'dream come true'

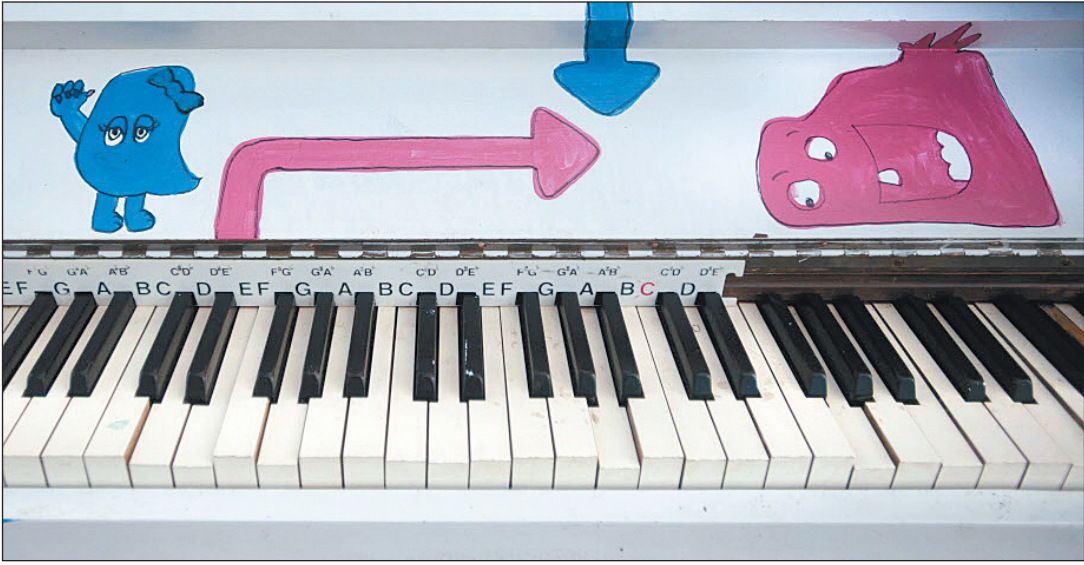
BY SHELBY HARTIN
BDN STAFF

Sarah Lin Johnson was 16 years old the first time she saw the Rockettes perform live. After years of watching the women on television, her parents splurged and bought her a VIP ticket to see the "Radio City Christmas Spectacular." She still remembers a tap number called the "Ragdoll Dance" the Rockettes performed that day. Their eye-high kicks astounded her. "That's when I knew I wanted to be a Rockette," Johnson said. Johnson grew up in Unity and attended Winslow High School. Even as a child, dance was the most important part of each day for her. She began dancing at age 2 and a half. By the time she was in high school, she was dancing with four separate companies, including Bossov Ballet Theatre in Pittsfield and Studio One in Oakland, where she danced both ballet and tap. "I was very serious about dance at that point, I just didn't know what I wanted to do with it," Johnson said. The VIP ticket her parents purchased helped her figure that out. Starting on Nov. 13, Johnson will begin her ninth season as a Rockette with New York City's "Radio City Christmas Spectacular," a show that's seen by more than 2 million people annually and stars the iconic Rockettes, a world famous dance company that has been around for more than 80 years.
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Queen City Piano Project: Meet the artists

BY SHELBY HARTIN
BDN STAFF

Geometric shapes of bright color, little monsters waiting for children to give them names and personalities, and rectangular patterns of yellow and orange hues. For three artists with three different approaches to art, painting a piano was a new challenge, but one they were willing to take on. The Queen City Piano Project, an undertaking by local arts nonprofit Launchpad,
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GABOR DEGRE | BDN
A piano painted by Lamoine artist Abbie Allen sits in Hayford Park in Bangor recently.

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